

Rachel Shisei (BRG), Papua New Guinea
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ADVOCACY AND LOBBYING: PROMOTING HUMAN RIGHTS AND EMPOWERING THE CIVIL SOCIETY

ADVOCACY AND LOBBYING

There may be many forms of Advocacy and Lobbying, but I will talk about how it's done in the work that I do with the Bismarck Ramu Group in the Madang Province of Papua New Guinea.

What is Advocacy and Lobbying?

Advocacy is speaking, acting or writing, with minimum conflict of interest, on behalf of the interests of a disadvantaged person or group, to promote, protect and defend their welfare in a way that is emphatic and vigorous.

Lobbying is a form of advocacy. It is the act of attempting to influence decisions made by government officials, legislators or members of regulatory agencies.

Advocacy can include a lot of activities that an individual or organization undertakes, like media campaigns, public speaking, commissioning and publishing researches. It is through such advocacy activities that individuals or organizations can lobby, in an attempt to influence decisions on public-policy and resource allocation, within the political, economic and social systems and institutions.

BRG'S FOCUS/CONTEXT

The Bismarck Ramu Group, BRG for short, is all about 'LAND', taking care of the Land that will take care of you. The theme is 'Graun Em Laip' in pidgin which is simply 'Land is Life' in English. BRG believes Papua New Guineans, like most Pacific Island Countries, have a very strong connection to their Land, and without Land they are nothing on the face of this earth, so the issues we deal with are centered on people and their 'Land'. The issue of concern that we are dealing with, is the "failed current model of development." This dominant model of development is exploiting our people. What we want is a "fair and equitable society where development is in the hands of our people". And we can only achieve this by: challenging and transforming the current model of development, and promoting the development model set by the Constitutional Planning Review Committee (CPRC).

The Bismarck Ramu Group advocates for a purpose, and that is to influence policies so that they reflect the Papua New Guinea Constitution.

Our message is unedited in using the social media as opposed to using the mainstream media where they edit, do their own spin/framing, to suit their agenda or whoever they partner with or support. Mainstream media is CONTROLLED and serves the interests of the government and corporations that own them, NOT the masses of the people. Our message becomes viral on social networking and we have made mainstream media dependent on us for some of the contents. We use social media to scan/check out who is out there that is supporting or opposing our agenda. Once we identify those that support our agenda, then we begin dialoguing with them.

We are active on Twitter, Facebook and we follow blogs like the Namorong Report, PNG Attitude, Pngexposed, the PNG Mine Watch and many others who pick up our stuff from twitter and facebook and blog and re- blog them. Our very own blog and website created just this year is called the 'Our Pacific Ways'. This blog aims to re-claim, our ways of doing things, traditions and cultures that worked very well for us, but is fading with these rapid changes in this so-called developing world. It really is about upholding the National Goals and Directive Principles, in the Constitution of Papua New Guinea.

OBJECTIVES REACHED THROUGH ADVOCACY AND LOBBYING

Groups involved in advocacy work have been using the Internet to accomplish their goals, with the argument that it helps to increase the speed, reach and the effectiveness of advocacy-related communication, as well as mobilization efforts, and the Bismarck Ramu Group is no exception.

We at the Bismarck Ramu Group have witnessed results, though most don't turn out to be what we hoped for in the end, but through steps along the way, the **internet** has proven to turn heads on all levels in our Advocacy and Lobbying work.

We are very active on the social networks, mainly Facebook and Twitter, also E-mailing, Blogs and YouTube and mobile phones play a major role in getting messages of what's happening across, as they happen within minutes and seconds.

Nonetheless we also make the Mainstream Media, that's the Radios, Television and the Newspapers, pick up on what's happening, again through the use of mobile phones and the internet. Eg: SABL (Ramu)-COI - land grabbing

ADVOCACY AND LOBBYING ON ALL LEVELS

Having been with the Bismarck Ramu Group for two years now, I believe Advocacy and Lobbying is VERY effective on all levels be it Local, Regional, National, Influencing Political Practices and Legislation, as long as there's persistence in updating any of the issues of concern.

However, just providing updates of issues of **concern** to people may not be giving that key message that you want the people to get, which is, the bigger picture! Therefore we treat every updates seriously as when there is an outbreak of an issue of concern, by connecting it to other issues that are pretty much related, and thus giving the target audience which is the people, the bigger picture. That has proven to be very effective. Eg: Environment Act Amendment **repealed**.

STRATEGIES/INSTRUMENTS SUCCESSFUL IN ADVOCACY AND LOBBYING

The demand for Modern Technology grows by the days, and it is only wise to utilize to the modern technology, especially with the use of mobile phones. These days apart from calling and texting, one can also take pictures, videos and most importantly, access the internet twitter, facebook and YouTube to post these pictures and videos as well as other links.

Photos and short videos taken from phones and directly posted on twitter, facebook and YouTube have proven to be very effective because people don't just read what we say, they can actually view or watch for themselves and make up their minds from what they are seeing. When they get the message, they in turn share the information around to their 'how many followers', and some of their followers in turn pick it up and share it to their 'how many' followers.

Eventually the message gets picked up by bloggers both nationally and internationally. When that happens, and everyone's talking about it, it'll no doubt get to the MPs and Ministers concerned regarding that particular issue, and eventually it gets raised in parliament and runs in the Mainstream Media nationally and internationally.

CHALLENGES

At this stage, problems associated with the **Internet** seem to be the hold up, because of the high cost of having to access it, and the knowledge and skills to keep up with the pace and catch up on the ever-changing methods of accessing it.

The mobile phone networks have helped in this area, but more people who own phones happen to be in very remote areas, and don't know how to access the internet, or don't even know of its existence on their phones. This group of people are the very ones with primary information of what goes on as things happen on the ground, but not knowing anything about the internet avoids most vital information from coming out.